

THE MEASURE

A JOURNAL OF POETRY



Autumn — — — — by John Butler Yeats
Poems by Hildegarde Flanner, Joseph Campbell,
Stirling Bowen, Joseph Auslander, and Others
The Cairn of Stars, Reviewed by Padraic Colum
Reviews of Two American Poets — — — —

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Autumn

GREAT lady of the darkening skies,
Great lady of the lustrous eyes,
Stay, stay your hasty tread,
And lowly bend your golden head.
Ah! hush that rending moan
Far wandering that turns to stone,
And lead, my loves and every thought
And all the visions I have brought;
Ah, hush that bodeful sound!
Is it of sky or hollow ground?
That we together in good faith
May talk of the great god Death.
In charnel house of little breath
Prisoners both are we to death,
And over all the freezing earth
Is not a sign of ancient mirth.
Here 'mong the ashes of the year,
In dregs of life, sorrow and no tear,
Memory on our minds doth lie
So intricate the old forget to die.
Great spirit of many moods,
Art thou god or devil of these woods?

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Sometimes a spectre vast and gray,
Sombre, blotting out the light of day,
And then a lightsome fairy here and there,
Making mock of grovelling despair;

And then a being of such gracious semblance,
As turns to tears the anguish of remembrance,
Ah, enchantress weaving spells,
What is it that thy riddle tells?
When sunset reddens the lofty trees,
And the birds are singing high jubilees,
And creeping night the woods doth darken,
Deep down in my heart I wait and hearken.
And in my heart is naught 'neath the arching sky
Save a reedy, tremulous, timorous cry.

When Death makes of the young its capture,
Innocence can call it still a rapture;
Not so the old; from their strengthless eyes,
Has faded long the fire of paradise.
They see the bareness of the ended year,
The ended day, the sunken sun and a fear—
Dust to dust is all, and earth to earth
Spite of love, spite of hope, and wild bird's mirth;
Great enchantress weaving spells,
Is this all thy riddle tells?
Kind angels often come to me,
To teach my brain their sophist glee;

Death's angels often come my way,
To touch my brain with mystic ray.
Fain to persuade that death's a seeming
A poor mortal's brain-sick deeming;
In vain, in vain—since there death stands
Almost to reach him with my hands.
Yet no. These angels softly say,
By dolour vexed your mind's astray.
If through the world death goes a ranger,
Yet mark him well he's but a stranger;
An Unasked Stranger at life's feast
To sour the wine and spoil the jest;
But I am I and in reason's pride,
Those angels false I wave aside.
Death to me is a bailiff strict,
No, a jailor he with bowl unmixed;
Yet what the sages say is true,
That you are spring and spring is you.
Again you'll come with blithest foot,
To kindle the spark in each succulent root.
Love's magic going the hedgerows along,
Brown throats all quickened with amorous song.
'Tis life, not death, that lays you down—
Warm in your russet gorgeous gown—
The rivulet shrinks in the parching air,
Out from the East a cold pale glare,
Stark with frost the forest boughs,
But she stirs in her sleep for she knows

That the bird in her bosom is Spring,
Cover her close with sleep's soft wing,
That she laugh in her beauty and have no annoy;
Who sleeps in beauty awakes in joy,
And here by thy door I'll sit and watch,
Till great Sol himself shall lift the latch;
Though thunders rolls and lightnings dart,
Sleep well and gently dream, sweetheart.

Hope's candle lights man's trembling way,
No more. There is no more to say,
Save that the sick man's latest sigh,
Blows out that candle standing nigh,
Alas for freedom and oh our frailty!
Be illusion mine and away reality,
When past is the surges thunderous roar,
And we list to the far recurrent lapse,
Of the ebbing tide on the desolate shore,
Comes, sweet as hope, the word—perhaps
In all the creeds and lexicons of sorrow,
Sleeps sweet with hope, the word—tomorrow.

John Butler Yeats

Prelude

He speaks

Open your eyes.
I have never seen them.

She answers

I am afraid to open my eyes. . . .
Be content to look upon my hands.

He speaks

Your hands are moist and gentle,
Your hands are long and slow
And smooth as apples.
Your hands are restful and far distant
As nude hills beyond hot plains.
Your hands are tender as young clover leaves.

I know the colour of your eyes.
They are grey of unripe peaches,
And silent green of peridot
Made dumb with stars.
Open your eyes.
I have never seen them.

She answers

I am afraid to open my eyes. . . .
Be content to look upon my throat.

He speaks

Your throat is white as an Egyptian moth
And curves like a temple bell.

Your throat glistens like oak leaves
And is cool as September wind,
Cooler than fresh earth.
I know the colour of your eyes.
They are blue as larkspur
And shimmer more heedlessly
Than snow on blossoming orchards.
Open your eyes.
I have never seen them.

She answers

I am afraid to open my eyes.

He speaks

Are they black as trees at night?
Are there wings of sun within them,
Fluttering at the candle of your thoughts?
Are they pale brown as tassels of summer corn?
Are they gold as Venetian sails?
Open your eyes.

She answers

I am afraid to open my eyes.
With them closed
I see forests pillared like the streets
Of ancient Antioch.
I see mountains
Transparent in the evening sun
As the yellow sarong of an Indian princess.

I know secrets so delicate,
They would shatter beneath gossamer.
There is forgotten fragrance in my nostrils.
Weighty and vivid music sags above me.
Can you hear it?
I feel distances without horizon,
And depths so great
That they are heights.

He speaks

Open your eyes.

She answers

Would life still be
Resounding days of singing columns,
Tall nights of wistful towers?
And would the sweet, immeasurable earth
Chant beneath my feet?
Could I still sleep beside the moon
And wake to silence coming like a flock of swans
Upon my consciousness?

If I should . . . open my eyes?

Hildegarde Flanner

Chiaroscuro

I. "WHEN I AM DEAD"

WHEN I am dead the moon will shine;
The lake will lift a bowl to catch her light;
The tree will sing.

——But what is Death?
I am the moon, the lake, the tree.

II. POLARIS

Polaris, thin as a sword,
Shines thro' the naked trees;
Shivers the waterfall,
Chilled by his icy light;
No rat rustles, no bird;
The frozen fingerpost
At the Ghouls' Crossway points——
"To Sirius, seven moons."

III. "THE MOON, LIKE LOVE'S BOW"
The moon, like love's bow, is bent in the sky.
In the lake it hangs heavily——
Love's bow no longer, crystal-bright,
But a sword of dark and bloody light.

Joseph Campbell

Cartoons of the French Revolution

I. MIRABEAU

YOU must have shocked your father when you came,
Club-footed, pimped. 'Twas for him as when
A gardener finds a crooked root to tend;
He feared the flower would stink and bring him shame.
He did not want your morals to be lame
At least. It was the same old thing again. . . .
Revolt has always claimed the best in men
And so you cried, "God damn the family name!"

And yet how sad a thing it was for France. . . .
You spent just half your strength to make France free
And half in jail through women and the dance.
And at the cry, "To arms!" you did but see
A dearer challenge in a haughty glance,
Behind the throne the lips of Queen Marie.

II. THEROIGNE DE MERICOURT

You taught more economics than a tome
Contains, you women marching on Versailles.
You were not there to save a world, or try.
Your theory was the simple monochrome
Of hunger, black as crusts you ate at home.
And either you or Louis had to die.
That simpler thinker only blinked his eye
Like Nero fiddling in the flames of Rome.

And you, Theroigne, there where none had grown,
Led forth a Reason: Women crying, "Bread,"
Plain women in the rain before a throne.
Assemblies talked; you knew not what they said.
You taught us there that hunger is the stone
We bear or hurl till we or kings fall dead.

III. CAMILLE DESMOULINS

Immortal madcap of those thronging days,
We'll say with Mirabeau, "Dear boy Camille."
You wrote Youth's name on Paris; bitter steel
You slashed with, laughing suicidal praise.
Inconstant heart, so many feared your gaze!
Although sometimes across your page a peal
Of bells rang out, their terror did not heal;
They thought Medusa sang the Marseillaise.

Revolt is endless; children press the strife,
And I, here, hold the pen you threw away.
Success, Camille, is measured life by life;
A man, but not the race, may fail his day.
May I succeed as you, that loved a wife
And rang the tocsin of the Cordeliers!

Stirling Bowen

Therapy

THERE is a way
Of healing love with love,
They say.
But I say no!
What! Shall pain comfort pain,
Fever cool fever,
Woe minister to woe?

Shall tear, remembering,
Wash cool remembering tear?
Shall scar play host to scar,
Loneliness shelter loneliness,
And is forgetting here?

Poor patch-work of the heart,
This healing love with love,
Binding the wound to wound,
The smart to smart!
Grafting the dream upon the other dream,
As gardener grafts tree to tree,
And both from the same wild root
Bearing their bitter fruit;
The new dream dreaming in the old,
The old dream in the new. . . .
And neither dreaming true!

Beloved!
Is there a heaven
Above the heaven we knew—
So well—?
Is there beneath our dream's awakening
A darker hell?
And shall we know them too?

One thing I know!
Of a vast giving that is a taking,
A wrong, a robbery!
Perhaps you so wronged me,
I so robbed you.

Therapy!
I am content to feel
This health of heart that will not heal;
I am content to think
That I am one with hunger,
Given to thirst,
And that I need not eat nor drink.
I am full-nourished so.

* * * * *

Beyond the wastes of wept-out woe
I see you still,
Holding toward me those tender hands
I could not fill;
My palms still curve and close,
Deeming they hoard
The shining things you poured
That I let spill.

Over us lift the years;
Hill upon hill
Of days that wither into night
And nights that ache to day . . .
Reiterated emptiness of shade and light
Crowding the emptier way.

Up to this high, sure therapy of time,
Beloved, shall we climb?

* * * * *

I know that I am tired: I would rather stay
Down in the shadows of our dear defeat—

Too still for invading grief, too deep—
A little while;
And sleep, as children sleep.
A little, little while!
Turn from my dreamlessness, and wake, and smile
Indifferent to the dark,
Holding to me my one-time joy,
As children clutch an ancient, battered toy
They will not have renewed;
Smile—and lie closer to a loss
That tunes itself to gain—
Inexorable lullaby—
Lie softer, safer,
Pillowed on pulseless fortitude,
Drowsy . . .
Beneath my pain.

Leonora Speyer

Sport of the Gods

HE reached up toward his mother's arms and smiled.
His hands were thin like talons of a bird,
And he could never utter any word
Of pretty prattle like the other child.

And though his body grew his mind remained
Like a small child's, as though malicious gods
With chuckling laughs, and jeers, and lolling nods
Held in a prison his dark wits enchained.

He was his mother's prayer, she guarded him,
With love enfolded him whom others spurned.
Each draught Life offered him she gently turned
To keep his lips from his cup's bitter brim.

His mother's arms he could no longer find—
Dear God! His soul was like the homeless wind.

Jessie Lemont

Blackbird

THE rhymes my master taught to me.
I've learned them word for word;
So today my master brought to me
A cage with a tame blackbird.

A stout, round, woven wicker cage
With a handle on the top,
And the bird just come of singing age,
Nor yet with sense to stop.

But I'd give all the tame blackbirds
That ever lifted note
For a little woven cage of words
Should hold the dreams that float

Just out of reach the livelong day
On lazy, vexing wing—
Oh then what would my master say
To hear his blackbird sing!

Bernard Raymund

A Sandal String

NO more than this: a sandal string;
Some little child of Egypt wore
The sandal, and has left—a string . . .
No more.

Yet fingers tied it when it tore
With too much dizzy frolicking
Of warm brown feet across the floor.

And when death came in like a king
Silently through the bolted door
Some mother kept a sandal string . . .
No more.

Joseph Auslander

Love and the Garlands

LET them have your laughter, give me only
All the withheld tears, the broken glory,
All the depth and silence of your spirit;
What have I to do with your exalting?
I can simply touch your fragrant garlands
Timidly, and wonder why you let me.

Always when I ask you why you let me
You seem half afraid, and tell me only
That I am the goddess of your garlands
And my fingers touch them into glory
Loftier than all the world's exalting,
Warm still with the murmur of a spirit.

O if I could hover with my spirit,
Breathe my wings about you! If you let me
Bruise them, let them bleed for your exalting,
They would know a darker flame that only
Comes when love is crushed and burned with glory,
Comes when love is dust beneath your garlands!

For I cannot weave you any garlands,
I can merely offer up my spirit
On the breathing altar of your glory,
Dumbed with one desire: will you let me
Burn at least for your sake, blaze, if only
To be one more torch for your exalting?

Sappho sang her heart out in exalting
Love, and braided for him throbbing garlands,
Yet the young white-throated shepherd only
Smiled and took with them her bleeding spirit. . . .
O if love, the lord of flutes, would let me
Fill some pulse of music with your glory!

But my song is silence, and my glory
Silence, for the moment of exalting
Chokes the song: and love will never let me
Wreath a lyric mist into your garlands;
Rather will the tumult of my spirit
Beat its own voice down and leave you only.

You alone, one voice, amid your garlands,
While I kneel beneath your singing spirit
Hushed, and hear your chords of triumph only!

Joseph Auslander

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ACTING EDITOR FOR JUNE, JULY, AND AUGUST—PADRAIC COLUM

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Three Reviews

Ships in Harbor, by David Morton. G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York.

THIS is a book to be read in the garden on a long, lazy summer afternoon when the critical sense is drowsing. At such a time David Morton's sonnets interspersed with other poems will afford a reader a certain delight, for one can swallow a great deal under cover of lyricism. But there are several shocks awaiting the reviewer of the book. Now that I have read it attentively, I cannot help wondering how those persons—and there are decidedly more than a few of them—who have followed Mr. Morton's periodical career for several years with a pair of shears for clipping, are affected by the volume. Frankly, I think it would have been better if Mr. Morton had left the poems uncollected and unbound.

The atmosphere of the book, outside of the opening and closing ship sonnets, which are excellent and which won for David Morton his ship sonnet reputation, and a few others, is of delicate ghosts and Aprils long blown by. One is treated to them in this guise or that on almost every page until, although they are lovely enough in their places, one gets a sense of inadequacy, of the touch of a light dreamer who does not face life, and whose blood runs thin. And the inevitable and most unfortunate result of this single piping is a constant reiteration in rhyme since one subject, however disguised, can bring forth only a limited number of rhyming words. I was utterly amazed to discover that in the ninety poems included

in the book, Mr. Morton has used as rhyme words "pass, grass" eighteen times, and "earth, mirth" fifteen times. It seems impossible that such a thing could occur without awaking the echoes in the poet's own ears. Far, far too many rhymes in the book are commonplace, especially since David Morton is so exclusively a wielder of the conventional rhymed forms.

"An Abandoned Inn" has a refreshing virility and the beginning of "Snow Dusk" shows vigor, and a lyric called "Affinities," which is short enough to quote, is a freshly imagined and delightful little thing.

Young girls love a slender birch,
Tall and blowing in the wind,
Silvered in the sun and rain,
And beautifully thinned.

Old men love an apple-tree
Twisted and knarled as they;
But when new blossoms line the bough,
The old men look away.

The only sign of passionate feeling, however, comes in the ship sonnets. Compared with the sea, Morristown, N. J., is apparently a poor source of inspiration, but a man who can turn those sonnets so well, should not be satisfied with sentimentality. "To One Returned From a Journey" gives an indication of what is bread to his soul. I shall have room to quote the octave:

You have come home with old seas in your speech,
And glimmering sea-roads meeting in your mind;
The curve of creeping silver up the beach,
And mornings whose white splendours daze and blind.
You have brought word of ships and where they go,
Their names like music, and the flags they fly;
Steamer . . . and barque . . . and churning tug and tow,
And a lone sail at sunset blowing by.

Carolyn Hall

A Canopic Jar, by Leonora Speyer. E. P. Dutton and Company, New York.

TWO chief impressions are made vividly by Leonora Speyer's book; first, that this book is, to an unusual degree, the portrait, fresh-painted and arresting, of a personality; second, that the writer has an equal facility in rhymed metre and in free forms. No better symbol could have been used for the title than the canopic jar, used by the Egyptians

for holding the person's heart. A heart is seldom so literally "an open book." Nor are the depths and strengths of loyalty and courage often so closely juxtaposed to the intricacies of perception and the deliciousness of whim. How nice that the same person wrote "Patch and Powder" and "To a Little Twelfth Century Figure of the Crucified Christ: The Cross Missing!"

"A Note from the Pipes" and "Rendezvous" are perhaps the two most unforgettably lyrical of the regular-metred verse. "Swallows" is typical of her best free verse:

They dip their wings in the sunset,
They dash against the air
As if to break themselves upon its stillness;
In every movement, too swift to count,
Is a revelry of indecision,
A furtive delight in trees they do not desire
And in grasses that shall not know their weight.

They hover and lean toward the meadow
With little edged cries;
And then,
As if frightened at the earth's nearness,
They seek the high austerity of evening sky
And swirl into its depth.

The essence of a poet takes form in his words and his rhymes. Leonora Speyer talks much of birds and wings and flight. "Only those that are fleet of wing" can follow, in "The Queen Bee Flies." And she herself is surely one of these.

Louise Townsend Nicholl

The Cairn of Stars, by Francis Carlin. Henry Holt & Co., New York.

THERE is a poem in *The Cairn of Stars* that tells how the poet, when, as a boy, he lay in bed ill, had a mirror placed before him so that he could see the passers-by in the street. His mirror showed him an Irish market town with its throng—

Market women and trading men,
Children and ballad singers,
Farmers coming to town, and then
The noisy auction-ringers.

and this is the throng that still keeps his eyes and his heart engaged. In his book is the friendliness of the market town, and the poems are about

types that we ourselves might have picked out in the throng—beggars and ballad-singers; handsome country girls; people who look as if they had seen the Fairies; men whose mien recalls some part of the heroic history of their race.

He writes of them all in verses and phrases that come out of their own tradition. Francis Carlin has perfectly one strand in the tradition of Irish folk-poetry—he has the tradition of the poet who gave words that the ballad-singer carried out on the street or to the place beside the peat fire. In this which is his second volume he is more the simple poet of the country side than in his former volume. In that other volume there was an heroic conception that gave him the accent of the bard—I miss in *The Cairn of Stars* the strength that was in such poems as “A Ballad of Douglas Bridge” and “MacSweeney the Rhymer.”

The roads of Ireland and the wanderers upon them; the nook by the peat fire that is so welcome to the wanderer—these are the scenes that come again and again into the poems of *The Cairn of Stars*. I have come to like better than any other poem in the book that poem that has all the love of the chimney-nook in it—“The Chimney Star”—it has the fantasy of a child’s imaginings. Here are two stanzas:

The greyest things in my mother’s house
Are my grandfather’s beard, and a careful mouse
That comes from behind the kitchen door
For the crumbs my kitten forgets on the floor.

And the brightest things in the kitchen are
A two-penny light, and a timid star
That hides away until I sit
Beneath the chimney to look at it.

Padraic Colum